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Spiritual Culture: Transcendence of the Fundamental Problems of Life

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Only the universal is rational.
The particular and the concrete baffle understanding.
(Emiel Durkheim, 1964: 31)

Abstract

This paper discusses spiritual culture as those instances of culture that transcend not only physical and sociocultural human limitations but particularly the fundamental problems of life: ignorance, suffering, and evil. It argues that this kind of transcendence is possible through the mechanisms of symbolization and valuation. All symbolizations are individual steps of transcendence useful in overcoming ignorance, but also certain value-attitudes are significant in this respect. Suffering and evil can be best overcome through enactment of certain value-attitudes. Only the latter forms of transcendence show the possibility of universal spiritual culture, that is, the possibility of the universalization of the values concerned.

Key words: spiritual culture, lower and higher forms of experience, transcendence, symbolization, valuation, ignorance, suffering, evil

The telos of culture

Life in modern societies is more and more differentiating and individualizing at the same time. Social classes are disappearing, but other lines of social subdivision are coming into existence through growing numbers of organizations and associations, growing work specializations and professions, computer literacy, differentiating ways of life, leisure activities and hobbies, differentiation of gender roles, various forms of youth cul-

tures or subcultures.

The driving forces of the dynamic cultural expansion are quite varied: the still growing knowledge explosion, the new techniques of communication, the advent of information society, growing intercultural communication, economic and political globalization. It appears to be natural and unproblematic that all development is expansion and change, but there seems to be a problem when change is unharmonious among collectivities that can no longer act independently. It is a fact that the world as a whole grows towards more and more interrelated collectivities. Within this situation it should be meaningful to look for what these collectivities could have in common and what would affect more balanced relationships. This is the goal of the present paper. Our core question is: do universal aspects of culture already exist or can they be developed? Could one discover a telos in the developments of culture?

In the search for cultural commonality, I propose to discuss universal spiritual culture. In this regard I will assume that universal spirituality must be sought in those aspects of culture that contain holistic meaning and in instances of culture where human selves surmount states of mind and action that have only limited meaning for life as a whole, intellectually, emotionally, and morally. In particular, I will argue that the important aspects of spiritual concern transcend the material and limiting sociocultural conditions of human life and its fundamental problems. Ultimately, I take the spiritual to be an important dimension of human well-being. 'Physical' well-being cannot be the only way of human happiness.

A crucial and problematic part of our subject matter is religion. Religious believers usually see it as the paramount area of the spiritual, but nonbelievers do not engage in the same way of thinking. Religion is a matter of latent controversy, not likely to be resolved soon. The categories of religion have evolved over long periods of time into different species and subspecies that in practice, more often than not, do not recognize each other. Partly due to this situation, many people are wary about religious matters, others reject religion as a genuine form of culture. Acceptance and rejection of religion is part of theories and identities. Because of its controversial nature, I do not wish to be concerned with religion directly.

In outline, I shall start the discussion by reviewing some manifestations and signals of transcendence as pointed out by Thomas Luckmann and Peter L. Berger, and continue with a discussion of the physical and socio-cultural conditions of living and the fundamental problems of life: ignorance, suffering, and evil. The last part of the paper con-

cerns the inherent mechanisms that make spiritual dimensions of life possible: symbolization and valuation.

Different views of transcendence

As can be seen in particular writings by two sociologists of religion, Thomas Luckmann and Peter Berger, the meaning of the term transcendence is considerably different when used anthropologically or theologically. This difference may also be expressed by saying that the latter use is substantially religious and the former functionally religious. The 'substantial' meaning is narrower than the 'functional' one. In other words, both stand for a maximum and a minimum possibility of transcendence respectively.

Luckmann (1967) utilizes the term transcendence in a 'functionally' religious or an anthropological sense, to indicate a quality of religion, that is, the "transcendence of biological nature," which is a key proposition in his theory of religion. His general goal was to criticize theoretical positivism in the sociological study of religion during the 1960s, which centered on superficial problems of secularization, such as the decline of ecclesiastic institutions and church-going. The sociology of religion, according to Luckmann, has theoretically more important tasks, for instance, theorizing the relation between the individual, society, and religion.

Luckmann neatly summarizes his view as follows:

"Religion is rooted in a basic anthropological fact: the transcendence of biological nature by human organisms. The individual human potential for transcendence is realized, originally, in social processes that rest on the reciprocity of face-to-face situations. These processes lead to the construction of objective worldviews, the articulation of sacred universes and, under certain circumstances, to institutional specialization of religion. The social forms of religion are thus based on what is, in a certain sense, an individual religious phenomenon: the individuation of consciousness and conscience in the matrix of human intersubjectivity (Luckmann 1967: 69).

Thus, Luckmann maintains that, by becoming conscious of one-self and by appropriating a structure of meaning, the individual transcends the abilities of his or her biological nature. The development of consciousness, as is clearly the case of the newborn, does not take place without assistance of other humans. Because mental development does not occur without external stimulation, it can be said that this form of transcendence is not given in the 'raw' biological nature. Luckmann concludes that its development is a uni-

versal, 'religious' phenomenon.

In turn, Berger (1970), as a sociologist, reflects on the possibility of theology producing a kind of theodicy in order to offset the far-going trends of the present-day age, which are profoundly secular, utilitarian, and hedonistic and which dismiss the supernatural. Resurgent forms of religion notwithstanding, Berger observes that religious believers are becoming a "cognitive minority." Being concerned with the fate of religion, he then discusses several "signals of transcendence" drawing on philosophical and sociological literature. By signals of transcendence he denotes "phenomena that are to be found within the domain of our 'natural' reality but that appear to point beyond that reality" (Berger 1970: 70). He derives these signals from the following: social order, human play, hope, humor, and the idea of damnation. Briefly summarized they are as follows. Firstly, Berger argues that order is a basic and necessary condition of social life, which may suggest the existence of a higher form of order in the universe. Secondly, human play, as part of the reality of life, suspends the rules of the 'serious' world. This, too, eventually points to the existence of another reality. Thirdly, in his argument concerning hope, Berger points out that human existence is always oriented towards the future, possibly a future beyond death. Though not validated by empirical reason, people continue to hope. Fourthly, humor, or the comic, reflects the imprisonment of the human spirit in the world. It also relativizes the 'serious' business of the world. Lastly, the idea of damnation presents itself as a form of negative reasoning. In other words, a refusal to condemn monstrous evil is a fatal impairment of *humanitas.* Either one denies that there is truth, or one looks for validation beyond this world, transcending the human world (Berger 1970: 66–96).

Berger mentions that many philosophical considerations can be brought forward to underscore his view, but, ultimately, he concedes that a transcendental dimension cannot be proven. Its possibility rests on an act of faith. This he calls "a possible solution to the vertigo of relativity" (Berger 1970: 92).

The views of transcendence discussed by Luckmann and Berger differ in the sense that the former does not discuss an explicitly religious reality while the latter explicitly relates his signs of transcendence to religious beliefs. Yet to me both seem to discuss similar phenomena, that is, general human conditions that are requisites for having religion. Thus, in Luckmann's view, qualifying the aspect of transcending individual biological nature as 'religious' indeed can be said to be religious in the sense that this transcendence is a condition for the formation of religious attitudes. Yet at the same time it is also a condition of being human. In other words, Luckmann's transcendence concerns

subjectivity and intersubjectivity, the most basic properties of human existence. Subjectivity evidently is the common condition not only of religion but also of all other forms of human culture. As for Berger's view, his signals of transcendence are expressions of human life that manifestly exceeds animal existence. Sensibility to order, relativization of overly rational attitudes, hope, humor and a sense of righteousness must be evaluated as human sensibilities and expressions of subjectivity, animals are not capable of.

In sum, one can say that both the above authors' notions of 'transcendence' merely denote a generic human phenomenon, which evidently is not religious in the narrow sense. A question that might be raised here is whether all forms of transcendence are equivalent, and, in the same breath, whether all forms of spirituality are similar in nature.

A term similar to transcendence is 'enlightenment' that, though not exclusively, is much used in the context of religion. Transcendence is primarily a Western, religious term, originally presupposing a radical break between nature and what is called the supernatural. Eastern religious thought predominantly presupposes the oneness or immanence of all reality. In this latter worldview, human life is merely a manifestation of Life in the universe. Enlightenment in Buddhism concerns the possibility of overcoming the contingencies of human life (ignorance) and of realizing the buddha nature (*bussho*) that permeates all forms of life and is somehow contained even in inorganic matter.

Both terms transcendence and enlightenment appear to have been devaluated lately, partially because of the rejection of religious attitudes and partially because of a new religious thought that does not rely on these terms. This seems to be the case of the New Age Movement or, more broadly, "the new spirituality movements and culture." (Shimazono 1996, 2002; Maekawa 2001). The aim of these movements roughly seems to be self-realization and seeking a more authentic self. However, inasmuch as the terms transcendence and enlightenment denote human phenomena, they need not be suspicious or fundamentally problematic. The same regards the term 'the spiritual' and the religious itself. In my view, all these terms are metaphors that express a specific, more or less distinct, characteristic of our subject matter: spiritual culture. To this we will return later.

The conditions of human life

Human life is conditioned by the physical and sociocultural, environmental factors on which it is dependent to the extent that dependence and contingency are characteris-

tics of human nature itself.

Obviously, all life is conditioned by its physical existence. Needless to say, individuals must fulfill physical needs in order to live and to act. The same is true for the proper functioning of the human mind. It is conditioned in two ways, 'internally' by the physical qualities of the human brain, and 'externally' by the existence of objects and other subjects to which it relates.

Basically, the material world is a world of usefulness for fulfilling physical needs—which is lately seen as an organic-inorganic system in its own right. The usefulness of the physical world in our age has become enormously enhanced by means of science and technology. Yet, for all its practical usefulness, the significance of the physical world is not limited to fulfilling physical needs. Humans also have non-physical needs that are served by observing the physical world as an object of thought and contemplation for intellectual and emotional enjoyment.

Further, human life is conditioned by belonging to collectivities. As referred to earlier, humans are basically *social* beings to the extent that they cannot become humans without stimulation by other humans and internalizing culture. Initially, in primary socialization, the internalization of culture proceeds more or less in an unconscious way. In secondary socialization, one internalizes culture through conscious identification. Both forms of socialization engender a sense of belonging. However, to the degree that collectivities are static, belonging may be experienced as a limiting condition.

Mental interaction with the physical and sociocultural world is the most basic condition of mental growth. The human self is essentially a growth-process. To repeat, humans *become* humans through socialization and the internalization of culture via communication with and through recognition by others. Self-identity is a social product. Dependence is as pervasive as it is profound. Dependence is further complicated through the fundamental problems of human life: ignorance, suffering, and evil, three forms of chaos humans are ill at ease with (Geertz 1973: 100–110).

Humans at birth are totally 'ignorant' to the extent of lacking self-consciousness. No knowledge emerges from within an individual organism. Having only a certain amount of potential, all knowledge has to be gained from external sources. In this respect, humans are quite different from the lower forms of life. Plants almost automatically realize their potential and animals develop theirs without much learning.

Human ignorance as a problem is well recognized by most religions. Human foolishness is a theme in the wisdom literature in the Bible, but Buddhism has dug deeper in

this terrain. Buddhism sees ignorance as lying at the core of the Law of cause and effect in the human world. It is the first link in a series of twelve that determine human existence (*juni engi*) (Mizuno: 1973; Dalai Lama: 2000). In a different way, foolishness in Buddhist teaching is seen a one of the three human 'poisons' together with greed and anger. Buddhism concluded that there is 'no-self,' exposing fundamental human dependence and the lack of self-sufficiency of individual human nature.

The second basic human problem is suffering, which comes at least in two varieties: physical and mental suffering. Some instances of physical suffering are quite natural, especially sickness and death. It is again Buddhism that has chewed most on this difficult to digest human condition. Suffering (*issai kaiku*), after dependency and the characteristic of no-self, is the third peculiarity of the Law of all living.

Other instances of suffering are inflicted by fellow human beings and eventually by one-self. These constitute the third category of fundamental human problems: evil. It is a special kind of suffering on which I will comment below.

Lower and higher forms of experience

If the human self constitutes a process of growth and self-fulfillment, one can distinguish different forms of experience, lower and higher forms, depending on whether growth and self-fulfillment are impeded or enhanced. Let us see some examples.

With respect to physical conditioning, experience seems to be of a low quality when the means for fulfilling one's physical needs are lacking, when usefulness is non-existent, when physical harm occurs through bodily dysfunction, accidents and natural disasters. In respect to social conditioning, particularly, at a time in history when self-realization is highly evaluated, becoming aware of merely 'existing' within a social group cannot be rated as very significant in terms of experience. Again, a form of lower experience seems to derive from attempts to maximize self-satisfaction as in the case of addiction to alcohol, drugs, and sex. Addictions often lead to depression and suicide (Anthony Giddens 1992: 65–70). Maximizing collective self-realization tends to cause forms of lower experience to other collectivities. Other forms of lower experience occur, e.g., in conflict situations and instances of discrimination, resulting in harm to one's sense of self-respect. Further, experience is of low quality when higher experiences turn 'sour,' when one experiences the absence of enjoyment, e.g., when one is confronted with ugliness, when internal confusion is too great to enjoy even the best of physical conditions.

The fundamental problems of life evidently denote a low quality. Becoming aware of ignorance can be very painful. The same is true for mental suffering in the face of adversity and evil. For most people, evil denotes harm done by others, constituting an injustice. A deeper problem is that "[T]he problem with evil is concerned with threats to our ability to make sound moral judgments" (Geertz 1973: 106). Casting doubt on our ability to judge what is good and what is not, and having to accept judgments of others in this matter may hurt our sense of self-worth.

In contrast, bodily feelings of well-being mostly lead to higher forms of experience. Other examples of higher forms of experience are the positive enjoyment of culture, of uncalculated acts of kindness, endearing emotional relations, creative contributions to social and cultural life, and so forth. Thus, one's family life and work may occasion higher forms of experience, yielding satisfaction and stimulating mental growth.

However, here we seem to have stumbled on a fundamental theoretical problem. Even though many experiences are clearly understood as having either a certain degree of positive or negative significance, it is not certain when such is the case and under what circumstances. Cause and effect is not easily discernable. That it is not clear what exactly constitutes lower and higher forms of experience is due partly to the fact that the boundary of these experiences is not clear. Ignorance in many cases cannot be helped; there are necessary instances of suffering such as the ultimate deterioration of health and dying; on the other hand, suffering may be evaluated positively from a religious point of view; it may be inflicted on purpose. Further, it seems curious that it is easier to locate lower forms of experiences than higher ones. Are lower experiences in reality more frequent?

Indeed, uncertainty about the outcome of these fundamental facts of life is both an existential and theoretical problem. In the following I will attempt to clarify two mechanisms of transcendence that may shed some light on those problems: symbolization and valuation. This clarification should be the more meaningful if indeed lower forms of experience are more in evidence than higher forms.

Mechanisms of transcendence

As mentioned above, humans at the beginning of life lack an innate behavioral orientation but have potential to develop orientations by learning patterns of behavior. I assume that symbolization and valuation are basic human faculties that underlie learning

behavior. Starting from this premise I further argue that symbolizations and values are core elements of culture, forming distinct mechanisms, responsible for the dynamism of culture. In reality, these mechanisms are closely interrelated. They function in combination but are analytically distinct.

Symbolization seems to be a mechanism responsible for extensive development. It is a source of meaning construction and a means of fixation of meaning. In contrast, valuation as a mechanism denotes evaluation of meaning. Speaking analogically, meaning construction can be said to be *linear* and evaluation of meaning *circular,* moving in and out of the former. Symbolizations accumulate differently from values. Subjectively, valuation is more subject to change. Similar to the above case concerning the awareness of lower and higher experiences, *value coordination* is as yet not understood well. Valuation therefore is the greater problem. Let us first consider symbolization.

Symbolization

All symbolizations are basically simple and similar. Symbolization works through substitution. One thing so to speak is the 'cultural' doppelgänger of another, or, the meaning of one thing is explained by some implications of another. Differences among symbolizations seem to derive from a lesser or greater degree of analogy. In other words, some symbolizations are mere substitutions, while others are analogies that have more 'weight,' more 'depth.' The latter I would like to call metaphors. It is these that generate new meaning.

Language basically is a symbol system. One can imagine that somewhere at the beginning of civilization and the initial development of speech objects were 'substituted or represented' by means of 'words,' that is, sound-formations. In the later development of speech, words were subsequently 'substituted' by means of written symbols, pictures, hieroglyphs, 'characters' (as in Chinese and Japanese) and combinations of letters. Thus, objects were 'substituted or represented' in two ways: phonetically and graphically. Not only objects but many other things were sebsequently represented in the same way: actions, thoughts, feelings, the properties of things, relations, functions, the dimensions of place and time, different modalities and dimensions of actions, and so forth.

Obviously, we are touching on complex problems of linguistics and semiotics about which my knowledge is limited but, I hope, sufficient for present purposes. Partly I am relying on Julian Jaynes' view of the significance of metaphor for language. To quote:

The most fascinating property of language is its capacity to make metaphors. But what an understatement! For metaphor is not a mere extra trick of language, as it is so often slighted in the old schoolbooks on composition; it is the very constitutive ground of language. I am using metaphor in its most general sense: the use of a term for one thing to describe another because of some kind of similarity between them or between their relations to other things. There are thus always two terms in a metaphor, the thing to be described, which I shall call *metaphrand,* and the thing or relation used to elucidate it, which I shall call *metaphier.* A metaphor is always a known metaphier operating on a less known metaphrand. I have coined these hybrid terms simply to echo multiplication where a multiplier operates on a multiplicand.

It is by metaphor that language grows . . . (Jaynes, 1993: 48–49, italics in the original).

Leaving aside the precise role of metaphor in the system of language, I totally ascribe to Jaynes' conceptualization of it, that is, symbolization in the narrower sense (Jaynes does not distinguish between symbols in a narrow or broad sense). In the following I will give some examples, some borrowed from Jaynes.

The formation of some words clearly reveals a symbolic origin in the broader sense. Good examples are: person, role, structure, system, status. 'Person' originally denoted the mask of a stage performer, 'role' a rolled up scroll, and so on. The new meaning of these words, the new concept that results, is an extension of their referents. Though differing in formation, some Chinese characters are symbolic in the same sense. They are simplified pictures of objects and till today show reference to the concrete, external reality that they represent. No new meaning is affected in the latter case.

Some words, the very metaphors, are symbolic in a special way. They generate new meaning. Interesting examples are the words father and mother, which are curiously similar in seemingly all Indo-European languages. Recently I checked them in Sanskrit, where they read *pitri* and *matri.* I was amazed to find that they are derived from words that denote heaven and earth, implying that the father figure from ancient times was symbolized with the 'metaphier' heaven, while the image of a mother was derived from the 'metaphier' earth. This 'vision' was retained in Roman and Geek mythology. The Roman Ju*piter*' is the god of the sky, one of the principal gods. Its relation to the Sanskrit *pitri* is evident. The Greek gods of heaven and earth, Ouranos and Gaiya, are personified as a father and a mother figure but these words have a different origin. Further, it is revealing that some words in Germanic languages related to 'earth' clearly are similar to the word mother (*mutter* and *moeder* in German and Dutch respectively). For example, the Dutch '*modder*' and the English 'mud', (both meaning the same) are of the same ori-

gin. Similarly, *Murast, moeras,* denoting a swamp in German and Dutch respectively are of the same origin.

A very interesting example of an unmetaphorical sounding word is the verb 'to be,' that together with its irregular conjugation was formed analogically. 'To be' derives from Sanskrit *bhu,* "to grow, or to make grow." The English "am" and "is" have evolved from the same root as the Sanskrit *asmi*, "to breath." Jaynes mentions: "It is something of a lovely surprise that the irregular conjugation of our most nondescript verb is thus a record of a time when man had no independent word for 'existence' and could only say that something 'grows' or that it 'breathes.' (Jaynes, 1993: 51).

There are many pleasant or unpleasant surprises, depending on one's mindset! Christianity teaches that God is like a father figure, because Jesus taught to pray to God as 'Our Father who art in heaven.' (He used the Aramaic *abba,* in a meaning and use similar to the English 'Daddy' as the best word to speak to God). Jodo-Buddhism believes in Amida-Buddha, 'who' is represented by a benign, dignified, mysteriously looking man-like figure sitting in meditation position. 'Amida' made vows to the extent of saving all people first before entering nirvana. Yet, in a different way, Amida-Buddha is thought to be the Eternal Life or the Eternal Light contained in the universe. Taoism believes in Tao, the unfathomable essence contained in the universe, constituted by Yin and Yang. Taoists symbolized this invisible existence with the character for Way.

The ancient people who fashioned these representations did not claim to have seen the Tao or God or the eternal Buddha, but they thought they had experienced something surpassing sense perception and expressed those feelings analogically in various ways. The manner of 'approaching' unseen realities or the supernatural, in its Western sense, is basically similar to the conceptualization of the words for father and mother in Sanskrit. It is also basically similar in the case of action-symbols and ritual.

Action-related symbols are much less numerous than word-symbols. The Buddhist wheel of the Law and the Christian cross are primary examples. The Buddhist wheel of the Law represents a wheel of a war chariot that is made to charge the enemy. Blades are attached to the axle at both sides of the chariot for more fighting efficiency. At the time Buddhism became a religion, it probably was the most effective piece of weaponry. The early Buddhists chose the wheel of a war chariot to represent the central theory of their religion, the eternal Law of cause and effect that shows the fundamental interdependency of all living things. Understanding the Law was thought to facilitate enlightenment. Through the understanding of the Law and acting accordingly, people would be

able to destroy all human passions (*bonno*) like a chariot destroying the enemy. As such, the wheel of the Law is a powerful symbol. The same holds true for the Christian cross that was a cruel instrument for torturing and killing criminals. It was transformed into a symbol of redemption. Both the wheel of the war chariot and the cross acquired new meaning. Symbols apparently are more powerful, the greater the difference between the original meaning and the new meaning.

The same can be said for the 'degree of transcendence' of metaphorical symbols, that is, the new meaning they introduce. Though it is difficult to judge to what extent, the transferring of meaning is different in each case. However, the more important point is that a transferring of meaning *effectively occurs* and that there is a gain in meaning. The *metaphier* of metaphorical symbols suggest more that their *metaphrands* contain. This constitutes transcendence. As in our examples, a 'heavenly Father' is not quite an earthly father but the image let one imagine God to a certain extent. Amida-Buddha is the Eternal Life of the universe, or its Eternal Light, which we can imagine when thinking of the life and light that we know. There is no guarantee that these symbols are 'true' in any literal sense. Except for the fact that evidently there is a gain in meaning as in the case of the wheel of the Law and the Christian cross, this meaning cannot be palpably verified. These symbolizations suggest the possibility of redemption in one way or another. Therefore, they may represent an advantage when confronting mental and physical suffering.

Valuation

Valuation, too, is basically simple. It is evaluation of action, of choosing what is useful, meaningful, gratifying. In other words, humans can judge and choose what is of use, what is good, and reject what is useless or bad. By acting and experimenting they find out what is most effective and what is most satisfying.

In attempting to theorize about values, I would like to maintain, first, that a value is an aspect of an act, the central point of which is gratification for oneself, for others, or both. Often, though not always, evaluation involves choosing between different ways of action. If a value is an aspect of an act, a value can be seen as the reward that results from acting that is internalized through acting itself. The successful act tends to be repeated because of its gratifying effect. As is often mentioned in theories about values, it is for this reason that a value functions as motivation for action. Yet, contrary to what is

often assumed, the fact that a value is an inherent aspect of the action implies that acting not necessarily involves choosing between different courses of action. In many cases, action seemes to propel itself, even to the extent of overcoming external constraint. In case choice is effected, it tends to be a choice between various rewards.

A second important point is that, prior to the internalization through autonomous action, values are learned from significant others. Successful internalization of values therefore depends on primary socialization. A 'good start' is supposed to be vital for having a more or less well balanced set of personal values—total balance is impossible since total socialization is impossible. Individuals growing toward adulthood of necessity must experiment with their set of values. Since action in daily life is varied, one's collection of values will be varied respectively. It is for this reason that ambivalence is characteristic of human action. Choice between different rewards will never be a settled matter.

Complexity of valuation and symbolization

The two mechanisms of valuation and symbolization, taken separately, are as plain as they are fundamental. The differences in their functioning also appears to be clear-cut. To repeat, symbolization involves meaning construction and its fixation. Valuation is evaluation of meaning. In reality however these mechanisms do not function separately but together. In daily life we are not conscious of the differences between symbolizations and values, between rational and symbolic action. In most cultural studies symbols and values are not distinguished, not even in studies of religions where symbols and values (commandments) are notably different elements. The main reason for not isolating these core elements, no doubt, is the fact that in reality they are closely related phenomena and show almost infinite variation in individuals, in collectivities, and within various patterns of social action. Tackling this complexity cannot be our present concern.

Finally, I will attempt a few considerations about the possibility of universalization of symbolizations and values and their role in creating spiritual culture.

Spiritual culture and transcendence

All knowledge functions as a means of transcendence of 'raw' biological nature in the sense discussed by Luckmann. None is given within biological human existence. Nothing emanates internally from the brain itself. A normally functioning human brain is a pre-

requisite substratum for the development of consciousness and subjectivity, and, as Jaynes elegantly argued, language has been of great consequence in the development of consciousness (Jaynes, 1993: 129–137).

Similarly, Berger discussed manifestations of human transcendence that involve symbolizations and symbolic action: the creation of social order, human play, expressions of humor and hope in adverse situations, and the condemnation of evil. Whether these things point to a higher order of reality is not important in the present context. As suggested earlier, the more important point is whether transcendence is affected or not.

The point I am advancing is that transcendence is created by metaphors, through the formation of concepts and new meanings. Due to being embedded in the concrete, symbols are essentially particularistic, even though they have a transcendent quality, shown in the birth of new meaning, including religious meaning. However, because of their embedment in the concrete and the particular, symbols are not apt to be universalized. For example, there are various views of enlightenment and many religious symbols like the Buddhist wheel of the Law and the Christian cross, each of which is important for the religion concerned—each religion can remain unique by retaining its own symbolizations. Another pertinent example is language as a symbol system. Language must not 'globalize.' If the whole world would come to speak only one language, culture will ultimately deteriorate.

Also values originate from concrete behavior. Values are aspects of acts. Yet as elements of culture, values are ideas about behavior and being. As such, values are shareable and better suitable to become universal elements of culture than symbolizations. Social values have the greater transcendent meaning the more they are shareable. The same does not hold for shared symbolizations, since they consolidate meaning. In the introduction I have stated hypothetically that the universally spiritual culture must be sought in those areas of culture that have transcendent meaning for life as a whole, intellectually, emotionally, and morally. Admittedly, this hypothesis sounds tautological. However, it will be easily agreed upon that lower forms of experience and situations involving the fundamental human problems of ignorance, suffering, and evil are not evaluated as meaningful. They are experienced as painful in various ways. Overcoming these problems and again being able to enjoy life leads to higher forms of experience. Although we cannot be certain about what in a state of mind actualy is of a lower or higher degree, we can find out how it is affected. The pain of ignorance can partly be overcome through humility, that of suffering through patience, compassion, and sharing of grief. Evil can be

overcome through forgiveness. Thus, humility, patience, compassion, and forgiveness are values that are significant as unique means of 'transcending' the respective problems.

However, the problem of ignorance is quite different from those of suffering and evil. Ignorance can more easily be overcome by means of symbolizations and knowledge than suffering and evil. All instances of metaphorical transcendence, originating in thinking, are little steps, little glimpses of spirituality. Transcendence in this case is affected through thinking that stops as it were when something new is found or created. All symbolizations create and fix meaning, although thinking itself does not become fixed. Values, on the other hand, are aspects of action. They are a matter of attitude, which is never fixed. Attitudes may change from one moment to the other. The transcendence of values is affected through will and the degree of transcendence will depend on the degree of will exercised. Suffering and evil can only be overcome minimally through knowledge but more through action that incorporates those values. While symbolizations are particular, limited in meaning or applicability, social values seem to have more applicability, paradoxically because the range of action is more limited than the range of thinking. Every day life is similar for all humans. Because all share the fundamental problems of life, all could share the same values to overcome them.

Universal spiritual culture then must be sought in those aspects of life that are common to all people. Overcoming of the fundamental problems of suffering and evil appears merit the greatest consideration in this respect because the ways of overcoming these seem few in number and common to all people. Transcendence in this area is more vital than transcendence in overcoming ignorance. Concern for reducing suffering and evil is possibly the place to look for the telos of culture.

Human life has an open dimension that developes through symbolization and valuation. Both processes produce spiritual culture. Both have a transcendent quality, but only valuation can produce universal spiritual culture. In other words, the greatest possibility for universalization appears to be given in the area of morality. Its primary condition is the inclusion of the Other. Durkheim's phrase "Only the universal is rational," takes on a paradoxical meaning. Coping with suffering and evil is usually not perceived as rational action.

Note

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